

"MORTAR & PESTLE" CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY WISCONSIN SCHOOL OF PHARMACY STUDENT WRITING CLUB:

Business Member Spotlight: Dr. Ellen Popov - Aurora Good Hope Oncology Clinic

by Kira M. Larson, 2022 PharmD Candidate

Advocate Aurora Health is a not-for-profit health system comprised of Advocate Health Care in Illinois and Aurora Health Care in Wisconsin.¹ With over 500 sites of care, Advocate Aurora Health is recognized for clinical excellence in areas like cardiovascular care, oncology, neurology, geriatrics, and trauma care. In addition to values of excellence, compassion, and respect, safety also plays a significant role in patient care.² At Aurora Good Hope Oncology Clinic in Milwaukee, Ellen Popov, PharmD, is the oncology pharmacist who works closely with other members of the oncology service line to provide the best care to patients.

Day-to-Day Practice

Aurora Good Hope Oncology Clinic is an ambulatory cancer clinic that provides services to patients receiving both oncology and non-oncology infusions. In addition to medication administration services, oncology pharmacists also participate in clinical drug monitoring, oversight of drug preparation, drug information services, drug interaction checking, and precepting students and pharmacy residents. Popov describes her work environment as fun, rewarding, challenging, engaging, and collaborative.

Pharmacists in the oncology service line at Advocate Aurora Health have unique collaboration opportunities with their department and other specialties, like oncology precision medicine, cardio-oncology, palliative care, research, clinic nursing staff, patient service representatives, medical assistants, and advance practice clinicians. As part of day-to-day services, Popov collaborates with healthcare team members to review current patient statuses and whether treatment adjustments are necessary. She communicates with other pharmacists regarding double-checks for treatment plans, overall treatment

clarifications, and coordination of product supply. Finally, Popov and her colleagues at other Aurora oncology clinics often connect to discuss complex patient cases. For example, Popov recently worked with a pharmacist in oncology precision medicine regarding a mutual patient whose disease had progressed. During their discussions, they evaluated which treatment option would be the best fit for the patient's current condition.

Popov has a lot of opportunities to give back to the community through the Sunshine Committee, which is run by the oncology pharmacy department. This committee works to foster support interdepartmentally, as well as in the community. Activities include supporting local charities through school supply drives, participating in Milwaukee River clean-

up initiatives, and joining local cancer-awareness walks. Popov also participated in advocacy through PSW by sending letters to local legislators in support of pharmacist provider status.

Raising the Bar

The oncology pharmacy department at Advocate Aurora Health has developed a collaborative workflow that fosters resource sharing and promotes discussion and learning. Popov believes this unique collaboration is a huge advantage when it comes to patient care.

Since the expansion of oncology services in the Advocate Aurora clinics, technology has been integral to the practice. With clinics from Green Bay to Kenosha, telecommunication and technology have been a large part of how pharmacists

Below: Outside Aurora Good Hope Oncology Clinic in Milwaukee, WI.



communicate throughout the department. Using telecommunications has allowed for remote checking of products, cross-coverage, and enhanced monitoring of patients. Additionally, as the practice has grown over the years, the team has implemented many enhanced safety measures to meet the organization's safety goals. Part of the practice model includes mandatory, virtual daily check-ins or safety huddles with the team to discuss safety, service, or quality issues. These meetings include pharmacy staff across many sites. Furthermore, the safety call is extended twice a week to give pharmacists time to discuss logistical or clinical issues, patient cases, or new developments in practice or guidelines. Pharmacy technicians also meet once per week to discuss logistical concerns and to collaborate as needed.

The pharmacy team also receives specialized training. They complete annual training updates via competencies, video training, and an extensive training manual that is frequently updated. Popov says a unique element of training in the oncology pharmacy service line is the extensive number of resources the team has cultivated over the years and the ongoing work to ensure that all members of the team have access to those resources. Pharmacy residents in the organization provide virtual grand rounds and forums on a broad range of healthcare topics, providing anyone an opportunity to listen in. At monthly pharmacy oncology meetings, time is set aside for pharmacists to present updates in an area of oncology practice. Lastly, board certification is supported by Advocate Aurora Health, and many of the oncology pharmacists have achieved board certification. This promotes lifelong learning in oncology practice.

Knowing that the main goal of the organization is patient safety allows the team to form clear goals towards practice advancement. For Popov, knowing that she can reach out to her team members with questions or concerns makes her feel like her opinions and ideas matter. Working together with leadership and her colleagues to solve problems helps form a strong bond of trust among department members. Popov believes the key to setting and achieving goals is to make them achievable. She works on setting small goals to learn or do one thing that will enhance her practice. Many of her goals revolve around her desire to stay

current with developments in breast cancer and gynecologic cancers. She accomplishes these goals by listening to podcasts or webinars with practice updates, which she can then apply to patient care.

Bumps in the Road

Pharmacy practice would not be where it is today without having had to overcome various challenges. At Aurora Good Hope Oncology Clinic, the most current challenges are shortages, which range from staff shortages to medication and supply shortages. The oncology service line makes a tremendous effort to work together to minimize the effects of shortages.

During the daily meetings, service challenges for the day are addressed, and the group works together to reduce the impact of these issues. Technology is an important tool. It allows the team to use remote coverage and order processing, as well as inventory reviews of other sites to enable supply sharing across the system as needed. More broadly, the oncology pharmacy team at Advocate Aurora Health has a large annual meeting that serves as an idea-generating session where the team can address current practice challenges and potential workflow enhancements for the coming year.

Popov has been a part of the oncology pharmacy team at Advocate Aurora Health for many years. A major challenge she faced was the integration of pharmacists into ambulatory cancer clinics. The practice change was a big shift from how the sites had previously operated. To overcome this challenge, the oncology pharmacy team personally met with each site and communicated proposed workflows with all clinic staff, and set the bar for how the practice has progressed over the years. Communication has been the key, including the increased use of technology. As technology has progressed, pharmacists have gained more real-time communication than ever before with other members of the health care team.

Change can be scary, but it can also be very exciting. There is always a fear that something may fail, but failures are opportunities to try again and learn from what didn't work. Originally, the shift to the current practice model was due to the need to have hospital-affiliated cancer clinics and to have a pharmacist review orders before a patient's treatment. The practice at Advocate

Aurora Health in oncology continues to be driven by a very dedicated team that strives to provide the best care to patients and continually looks to improve their practice.

Moving Forward

For future growth, Popov plans to continue her education in oncology pharmacy practice, as the field has seen tremendous growth and advancement in the last several years. Her goal is to keep pace with the changes. Professionally, Popov has supported legislative changes that would grant pharmacists provider status in the state of Wisconsin. With the recent approval of the pharmacist provider status bill in Wisconsin, Popov is excited to see the benefits she knows can be achieved with provider status, and how they will impact patient care. Specifically, she hopes to work toward a pharmacist-led program providing additional support for side-effect management of cancer patients. To other practice sites hoping to implement practice advancement initiatives, Popov says to first determine the main purpose of the service and ensure that all the steps align with that purpose. Next, communicate to the stakeholders the goal of the service and the steps needed to achieve that goal. Finally, reframe the idea of failure. If what you are trying to achieve has setbacks, use those "failures" as opportunities to learn and refocus to achieve your goal. The outcome will surely be all the stronger for it. For individuals wanting to practice in this field, Popov's advice is to trust and believe in yourself. You are capable of doing whatever you put your mind to.

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